

FRIGHT NIGHT

Tom Holland, author of *PSYCHO II*, makes his directorial debut and revitalizes the vampire genre.

by Charlotte Wolter

If first-time director Tom Holland has his way, *FRIGHT NIGHT*, which opened August 2, will bring new respectability to a tradition he genuinely reveres: the vampire film. "The last gasp of the genre was the parody, *LOVE AT FIRST BITE*," he noted with scorn. "*THE HUNGER* was so ashamed of its genre that it didn't even mention the word vampire. They were terrified of it. This film is the first modern retelling that stays faithful to the conventions of the myth. The vampire is very contemporary, but still subject to the laws of the genre."

Holland, who wrote *PSYCHO II*, is an intriguing character in an industry of professionally interesting people. A former actor in soaps (*LOVE OF LIFE*, *A TIME FOR US*) and over 200 commercials, he is a Phi Beta Kappa UCLA graduate and a member of the California Bar.

No stranger to the blue-collar world of genre films, Holland has also scripted such modest works as *CLOAK AND DAGGER* and *CLASS OF 1984*. "I never start out to do them," claimed Holland. "It's just that they are the entry-level jobs in the business. I consider myself a writer of psychological suspense much more than I do horror. In *PSYCHO II* there are some carefully chosen horrific images, like the knife in the mouth, but generally it was a dialogue and character film."

Reluctant vampire killer Roddy McDowell watches a werewolf in its death throes.



Christopher Sarandon as vampire Jerry Dandrige, in makeup by Ken Diaz.

Jerry Dandrige, the film's vampire, is portrayed by Christopher Sarandon, whose extensive credits include the Stratford Connecticut Shakespeare Festival and numerous on- and off-Broadway appearances. Sarandon's preparation for the role included inventing a detailed biography for the character. "The scenario I created for myself was that here is a man who has not only lived hundreds of years, but also lived them unable to make any lasting human bonds," he said.

Added Holland, "It's not a very pleasant way to live out eternity, being constantly chased and hounded. I didn't want to re-write the story and make him a nice guy, but I did want the audience to have a sense of the curse of being a

creature like this, as well as the attraction of it. I needed someone who was strongly sexual, but who would also be willing to scare the shit out of you. Sarandon had both qualities."

Newcomer William Ragsdale, delighted to be making his feature debut as the film's teen hero after solid stage experience, is appropriately ingenuous as the youth who stumbles onto a vampire in his home town. Casting Roddy McDowell as a former horror star hoping to recapture some of his past glory was sheer inspiration.

"I had to have people who would deliver for me," said Holland about his cast, "because I was asking so much more than is usually required within the genre. I wrote strong acting scenes, and I did some scenes in masters so they had to give a sustained performance for 2 to 3 minutes."

Holland called on Richard Edlund's Boss Film Corporation to produce the special effects which range from matte shots to a puppet bat. The most impressive works are the makeup creations of Ken Diaz.

Both Sarandon and Amanda Bearse, who plays Ragsdale's girlfriend, undergo startling makeup transformations. Even genre veterans were visibly startled by the gruesome sight of the wholesomely pretty Bearse arriving on set in a macabre full-face prosthetic for her vampire scene. In another scene, makeup effects create the metamorphosis of one

character from a wolf to a boy.

An elaborate, antique-filled jumble of rooms which rambled through two sound stages was production designer John De Cuir's set for Dandrige's sinister mansion. The set was like visiting an immense Halloween funhouse.

How does Holland think modern audiences will react to a *now* vampire film? "Hopefully it will be scary enough for those who are into vampires, but also with enough character, relationships and just plain fun so that other people will like it too," said Holland. "I think, if you want to do it successfully, you have to embrace it with great caring. There is no sense that this film is a parody of the genre. The vampire is dead real, a real threat. The danger is, if you don't get a willing suspension of disbelief, the audience is going to be laughing in the aisles."

"I think also that all of us want to believe in the vampire legend," added Holland. "There are certain fantasy characters that have a sort of timeless appeal. I don't know what archetype it is, but it is one that sure is appealing to the human consciousness." □

McDowell with the film's teen leads, William Ragsdale and Amanda Bearse.

